

C A N D I D  
R E F L E C T I O N S  
O N T H E  
R E P O R T  
(A S P U B L I S H E D B Y A U T H O R I T Y)  
O F T H E  
G E N E R A L - O F F I C E R S,

Appointed by his MAJESTY's Warrant of the First  
of November last, to enquire into the CAUSES  
of the FAILURE of the late Expedition to the  
Coasts of FRANCE.

[Henry Fox]

In a LETTER to a FRIEND in the Country.

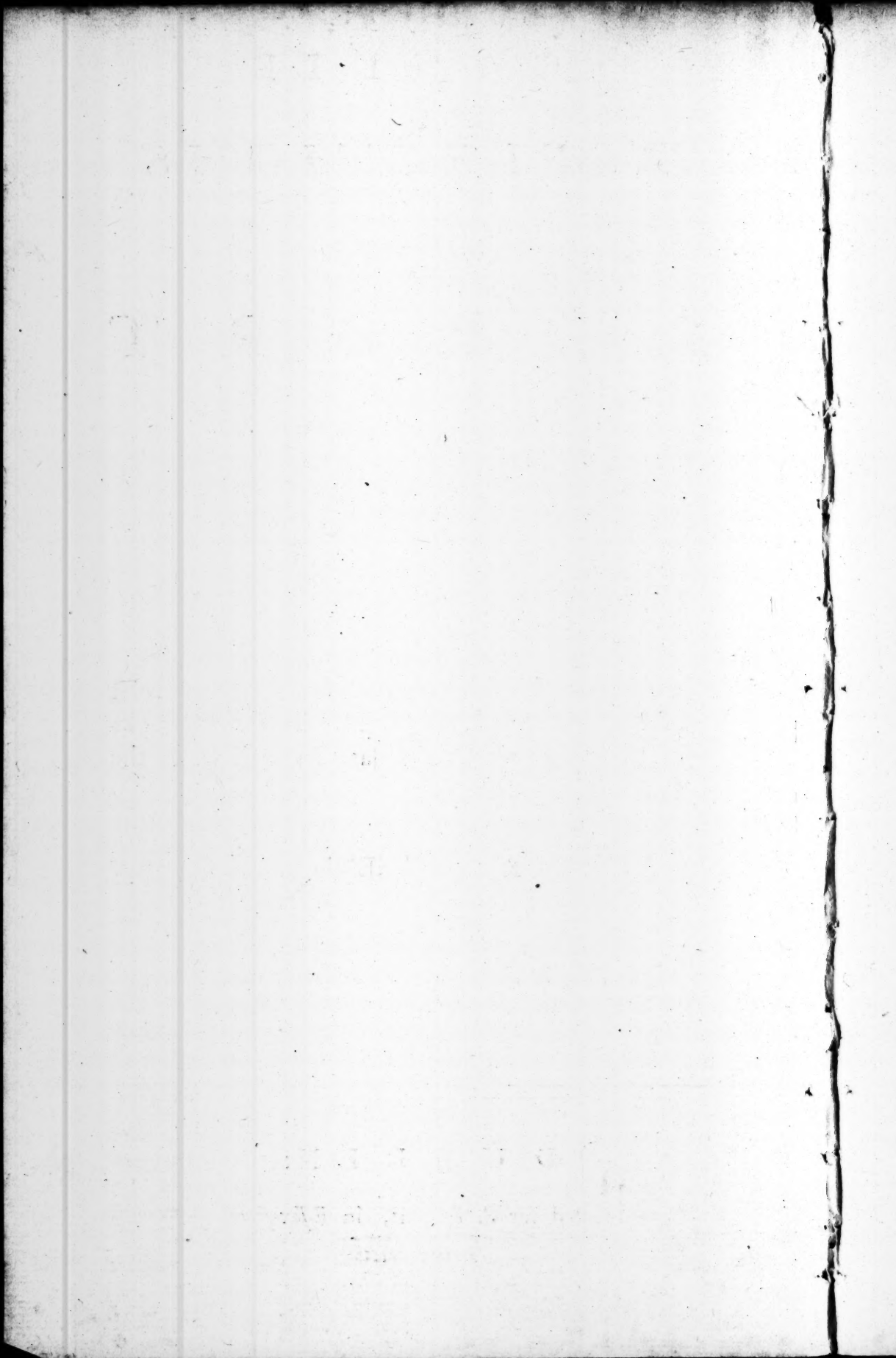
— *Non, si quid turbida Roma*  
*Elevet, accedas, examenve improbum in illa,*  
*Castiges trutina.* PERS.

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D U B L I N :

Printed for S. SMITH, in *Essex-street.*

MDCCLVIII.



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C A N D I D  
 R E F L E C T I O N S  
 O N T H E

REPORT of the General Officers, &c.

S I R,

**A**FTER your having all along expressed so great a curiosity for knowing what passed here, with respect to the consequences of the failure of our expedition, I cannot be surpris'd that, on receiving the Enquiry thereon, published by authority, you should desire to have some further explanations, to clear up what may be still left obscure, or whereon to ground your conjectures of any ulterior procedure therein. Willing as I am to oblige, and at the same time not to deceive you, I can only assure you, that you may depend on nothing but the most exact truth in any communication of mine, so far as I am capable of attaining or comprehending it. No falshood of fact or inference will you find, that may be a reproach to my profession, of candor, however it may be one to my judgment or information; for neither of which I can pretend to answer.

I need not tell you with what eagerness and satisfaction the public received his majesty's most gracious declaration of his intentions, that a faithful enquiry should be made into the causes of the failure of an expedition, prepared with so much ostentation of force, whilst its detestation was kept so profound a secret, and on which the perhaps over-

raised expectation of many seemed to rest the very issue of the war.

But though the specific place on which the storm was designed to burst was not known, at least to the public here ; yet it was long enough beforehand pretty clear, from many indications, that whatever it was, it must lie on the western coast of France, from Calais to Bayonne inclusively. This foreknowledge then, would doubtless induce the French to give orders for guarding, in the best manner that could be, the whole extent of the threatened country, and each particular place of it liable to insult, in a lesser or greater degree, according to the apprehensions reasonable to be respectively entertained for it.

To say the truth, Rochefort, the very place which, from its situation, seemed the least to invite an attack, was consequently the most neglected by the French in their plan of defence, and therefore bid the fairest for success against it, in case of its being practicable to penetrate with a body of troops, so far as to get before it ; whilst the dispersion of their forces, stationed either in the places judged more obvious to insult, or within reach to succour them, should give our's the fairer play for carrying it by surprize. Considering however its importance, especially in point of its being one of the principal ports of equipment, implying in course its containing docks, stores, arsenals, and shipping, the destroying of which would be cutting the very sinews of their marine-force, which must make it the more a national object for us to attempt ; it cannot reconcileably to common sense, be imagined they would intirely leave it out of their general plan of defence. They might not indeed do all that would have been done to put it into a condition of not fearing an insult, if they had feared one ; but they undoubtedly made some dispositions against a contingency, which if not probable, was not however impossible ; or, no doubt, the great wisdom of our government would not have pitched upon it for its object.

Besides, that in all enterprizes, especially meant for bold ones, all the objections, which it is so right to weigh and consider, are, for all that, not to be slighted, on sufficient motives to out-balance them ; amongst which not the least is that axiom of marshal Turenne's in war, That one is not always to suppose an enemy will do all that he might do. The point is to weigh resolutions maturely ; but when taken, to execute them with constancy and intrepidity. Whether then the expedition, now under consideration,

was



was defective in the projection or in the execution, stood the matter of a fair enquiry. But as the decision on the execution, by such an enquiry, naturally and ultimately includes the judgment to be formed on the projection of the enterprize, the failure of it was not without propriety, made by his majesty's orders, specifically the object of examination.

But before I take notice to you of the report of the commissioners on that enquiry, I shall observe to you the state of the public opinion on the disgraceful return of so powerful an armament, without effecting any thing answerable to the hopes or designs of its outset.

The greater part of the nation, with the best of meanings to its honour and interest, in the heat of its resentment for disappointed expectations, took the readiest objects to vent it on, the commanders on this unsuccessful expedition. Another part, and by far the least numerous one, though equally well-meaning, remounted higher, to the plan of projection itself; and doing justice to the goodness of its intentions, doubted at least of there having been sufficient grounds of knowledge or information to have warranted the undertaking.

Some, merely guided by private attachments, or prejudices in favour of the projectors, or at least of the principal promoter of this attempt, extolled it to the skies, admired the activity of the new m---n---r, that made so glorious a contrast for him to the past indolence and inaction of his predecessors; not without throwing out shrewd hints of the envy of some who had opposed his rise to power, having been carried to such treasonable lengths, as secretly to have thwarted and countermined his operations. On the other hand, others, perhaps influenced by considerations of the like private nature, by pique, prejudice, or even that envy of which they were accused, treated, or affected to treat, the whole plan as chimerical, crude, and indigested, both in the projection and appointment of the execution, from which no better nor other success could be expected than what befel it; that the whole of it was the scheme of a man, who wanted to value himself upon what he did not understand, and rather than do nothing, with which he had so often reproached others, would do something that, he could have no just reason to imagine, would not be infinitely worse than nothing. For which of these two opinions was the least unjust, I not only refer you to the facts and testimonials that appear in the course of the enquiry,

quity, but to that knowledge of the local position of things, where the attack was levelled, which you either have, or may so easily come at.

It is also not unworthy of remark to you, and what you will easily believe, that the loudest declaimers against the commanders of the expedition on their return, for their tenderness to their persons, their declining of danger, and the timidity of their councils, were to be found precisely among the rankest cowards, or at least the most reasonably to be suspected such. You might have heard in coffee-houses, publick assemblies, not excluding the highest persons who had never seen the face of danger, nor most probably ever desired to see it, the fiercest in the condemnation of the gentlemen employed; ridiculous and contemptible however as this division of judges may be, they are always too numerous, and serve to fill the cry. On the other hand, the most truly brave and noble, who ever judge the best, were not ashamed to own, they thought the non-protestation and concurrence of a Hawke, a Knowles, and a Broderick, (to say nothing of the military officers, as being with equally unattainted characters more personally however concerned) were a great prejudice in favour of the resolution of returning, on taking it for granted, that nothing could be done.

I shall here say nothing to you of those over-refined politicians, who pretend to discover in the combination of conjunctures, a tenderness for H---n---r, or at least a connexion with the convention of Stade, which might either occasion an armament to be sent out by way of amusement, on an enterprise, where it was fore-known nothing could be done that might too much exasperate France to reprisals on H---r, or an intimation to be properly given, that nothing being done, would not be the most displeasing thing imaginable. Such conjectures, however countenanced by the issue itself, or by fortuitous circumstances, cannot be penetrated, at least by the publick; and, without proof, it is most certainly not only unfair, but even treasonable to insinuate them.

In one point however all ranks of people united, and that was a general dissatisfaction, at this enterprise having either been so weakly projected, as not to suffer even attempt to execute it, or at the defect of the execution itself: it is plain the fault lay somewhere, and it was natural to wish the ascertainment of, where the blame was to be imputed for a miscarriage, which, not to mention the interests of the nation, affected by the great charge to which it was put on  
this

this occasion, gave in the eyes of our enemies, and indeed of all Europe; a kind of ridicule to our arms and councils, to which, most certainly, there before needed no addition.

The city, whose power of example has such an influence over the other towns and corporations of the kingdom, was beginning the motion, for an enquiry, which would probably have been universally followed. But to this, a stop was put by an extraordinary, but most gracious preventive message of assurance from the throne, delivered by a kind of sub-secretary, importing, that there was no occasion for its being addressed for such a measure, which was already determined, without the trouble of such an application.

Many were charmed with this unusual strain of condescension, in the court's being pleased to take notice of what was transacting in a city-assembly, and even preventing those desires, the formal expression of which, would probably have been the result of its deliberation. Some indeed, thought the step rather irregular, and that such an interference in matters only under consideration, could not on any pretext whatever, be either acceptable, or strictly conformable to privilege. But, waving that question as foreign to my present purpose, I shall go on to observe, that the promised enquiry was set on foot, in manner and form as you will have seen by the account published by authority.

You will naturally too have concluded, that the three great personages appointed for the examination of so important a matter, on so solemn an occasion, as giving the nation at least a preparatory satisfaction, were such as were at the head of the military profession, consummated in the art of war, and had seen a great deal of service, or at least enough of it to give abundant weight to their decision. In so concluding, you will have been in the right: To none is it unknown, how much they were so.

Yet, however authoritatively, beyond dispute warranted this board of enquiry was, as no accusation was formed, no charge laid; the commander of the expedition, whom the enquiry principally affected, thought himself at liberty to call it, "*A proceeding not quite common.*" (*Enq.* p. 59.) To say the truth, I am not lawyer, or versed enough in the course of practice on the like occasions, to determine whether he was in the right or wrong for making such an objection. Neither do I pretend to give a proper name to the procedure founded upon the royal warrant: it has indeed the air of a military inquest, proceeded upon by a grand-jury of general officers. But even before a grand-jury,  
there



there must be a bill, with specification of the party charged, found for a return of *Ignoramus* or *Billa-vera*; and surely a trial it could less be called, as there was neither arraignment of party, nor sentence, nor any thing but a bare opinion past, which has nothing of judicial in it, however greatly instructive it may be; of which more hereafter.

Should, however, the result of this enquiry operate in the nature of a *Billa-vera* of a grand-jury, without the formality of a particular charge having been included in it; certain it is, that though the commander of the expedition ought to, and probably does wish for nothing so ardently, as a regular trial proceeding upon the foundation of the report; he will, however, be under this disadvantage, that he will have had twice to answer one and the same matter: and, that his defence will have been staled by such a pre-examination.

Now, I doubt not, Sir, but you will have perused the Enquiry with all that candor and impartiality which alone can give you a right to judge of it; and it is in that confidence purely that I offer you such remarks as have occurred to me on it.

It cannot in the first place have escaped you, that all the officers of land or sea, whether witnesses or within the contingency of being parties either to a future charge, or to the blame only, unanimously agreed on supporting the expediency of returning without further attempt. Not one of them give so much as the least reason to imagine there could have been any thing done against Rochefort, circumstanced as things were, except indeed something of a tendency to such an insinuation may be gathered from the examination of colonel W--- Cl---on whom it was more immediately a personal incumbence, to support the honour which the information he had given in of the state of Rochefort at the time he saw it, that is to say, three years before the expedition took place, had met with, in that the resolution of having that place attacked seems to have been principally founded upon it.

But before I enter upon a discussion of the motives for or against attempting a descent, it may not be superfluous to state to you some material differences between the accounts given in or believed here, and those which were circulated in Holland and other neutral parts of the continent.

You will see, especially (*Enq.* p. 69.) in the Memorial of the actual force of France by land, &c. the sum of its regular

regular troops to be under two hundred thousand : And there seems at least to be some exactness in the calculation, as well as in the account of their destination. I am far then from calling the truth of this account in question ; but so much is certain, that the French king is more generally judged to have upwards of three hundred thousand regulars in pay : And if this last state of his force is exaggerated, at least, it is very easy to know whether it is so or not. The military lists are in France, open enough to examination, not to make it inexcusable the taking any false measures by any misrepresentation of them.

As to the militia, and especially the *gardecôtes*, as they are called, stationed along the western coast from Calais to Bayonne inclusive. You may have known it currently received here, that there were not above thirty thousand men spread along that vast extent of country, which must but thinly indeed line the coast of it. Whereas it is much more near to probability, if not to truth, what not alone the French themselves give out, but what many others acquainted with the state of that country aver, that there are above one hundred thousand militia men kept up in constant training, and have been so ever since the year 1686, now about seventy-one years, specifically along the western coast. The reasons too for keeping up such a militia are obvious ; being designed not only as an occasional guard against any invasion, but as a nursery of soldiers ever ready to recruit their armies ; the draughts for which service are immediately replaced by the generalities, according to a settled repartition, which is severely observed.

I have the more insisted on this article of the militia, because it seems contradicted by a paragraph in colonel Cl----'s letter (Enq. p. 67.) in which are the following very remarkable words.

“ By the Expedition to Port L'Orient in 1746, it appeared to me, that the country-people in arms are very little *better* than our own ; and that an officer who *possesses* himself, might march safely from one end of a province to another, with only five companies of grenadiers, where there are no regular troops. They imagine at first, that they can fight, and their intentions are good, till it comes to the point, when every body gives way almost before the firing of a platoon.”

Now, whether that gentleman means by *country-people in arms*, only a sudden collectitious rabble of peasants, or the militia of the country, I cannot possibly think them in either



of these constructions even so good as ours. In bravery I am sure, the common country-people of England are, at least, equal to the same class amongst the French, and in bodily strength greatly their superiors; and discipline is here out of the question: So that I grant him towards his argument for placing the French in a despicable light, even more than he asks. Nor am I in the least in this partial to my own countrymen: And surely no English officer can with a very good grace, suppose his countrymen, especially the irregulars of it, inferior to the French ones; if he but recollects, that our regulars have within these few years stood in no very advantageous light of comparison with our irregulars, either within the precincts of this island, or in America. The naming of Port L'Orient seems too a little misplaced; for I do not remember that we made a very capital figure in that same expedition of ours against it in 1746. I do not know what proofs of cowardice, on coming to the point, the French *country-people in arms* then shewed; but this I know, our regulars gave incontestible ones of their expedition at getting on board their ships again. There were scurvy reports at that time propagated, of their having taken rather too sudden a panic; but may be they were false ones raised by the French; though never sufficiently contradicted here.

As the above quoted paragraph, however, tended to corroborate the recommendation of an attempt to surprise Rochefort, by shewing there was no material opposition to be feared from the militia, or the *country-people in arms*, you will not think it beside the purpose, my having given you the contradictory idea others have entertained of that point. I do not pretend to say which is the truest; but I dare swear you will not hesitate upon pronouncing which is the most probable.

But granting that the militia was no such invincible obstacle to such a fine body of regular troops, on the supposing these landed, and on their march towards Rochefort; and that it would not have stood a brush at their approach, how many essentials remained to be indispensibly considered? which never were so, because they were not even known, before Rochefort could be, with any shadow of reason, presumed possible to be carried by a *coup-de-main*, if I understand that expression right.

Definitions, it is said, in law are dangerous; but in common sense I am sure, they are absolutely necessary. I presume then, a *coup-de-main* is a French term; for what in plain English I should call, a sudden exploit of arms, or stroke

stroke of war; the success of which generally depends on the surprize and consternation of the parties assailed, and the impetuosity of the assailants. I do not, however, pretend to give this English translation of mine for a just one; but of this, I am sure, the French expression, considering the idea it is meant to convey, is a very vague and deficient one; as according to the strict import of the words, there is hardly an action in war but what may come under that denomination. But not to chicanery terms farther where the idea seems to be sufficiently settled, you will easily see, in the Enquiry, that the time considered between the fleet's appearance on the coast, that is to say, the 20th, when the object of its mission became patent, and the council of war held the 25th, that surprize, which is one good half of the constitutive of a *coup-de-main*, must have absolutely ceased, and been out of the question. Unless, indeed, you can suppose, that after having so long known the general destination of the armament against the French coast, that people had fallen into a profound sleep, or would stand with their hands folded, and omit all dispositions for receiving, as the case required, such a visit.

As I sincerely believe, not only colonel Cl--'s account to be exactly just, to the best of his knowledge and apprehension, and conformable to the truth of things; nay, that no material alterations had been made in the works for defending Rochefort itself, since the time he saw them in 1745; so must it be full as evident to any officer or engineer, who considers his description, joined with the necessity of taking preliminarily the fort of Fouras especially, at the mouth of the river, (of which colonel Cl---, could for very good reasons give no account at all;) that few places on the globe could more safely defy a sudden insult than Rochefort.

A numerous militia, a ready supply from neighbouring garrisons, on the appearance of a fleet, the necessity of so much time to be consumed in a debarkation, at so great a distance as Chatelaillon-bay, and that under every disadvantage imaginable; or the impossibility of landing nearer, without taking the fort of Fouras, at the mouth of the Charente, are all such glaring *remoras*, that before a body of troops could hope to penetrate before Rochefort itself, that town, with no more works than described by colonel C---, might with infinite ease, be put into a condition of laughing at almost any number of troops that should appear before it; especially unprovided with stores and materials for a regular assault, into which the attempt to surprize it, must have

been in course converted. As much as it is a rule in war, not to suppose that an enemy will think of every thing that might guard against an attack, as little can it be one, to suppose that he will think of nothing. And surely a supplement of the deficiencies in the works for defence, that need not take up four and twenty hours labour, could not well be imagined to have been omitted. No wonder that the French have since given out, that if they could have specifically named the place for the English to have pointed their attack at, it should have been Rochefort. If you would believe them too, or if you will but believe the suggestion of common sense, nothing could be more grossly false, than the reports which prevailed here of their being so panick-struck, with the preparations of our tremendous armament, as they were represented. Numbers indeed, of families, either retired from the neighbourhood of the shore, or, secured (those who had any) their effects, by sending them up the country; but nothing more: For the rest, all the dispositions were made with the utmost phlegm and tranquillity. The militia was raised, the regular troops stationed, in readiness to carry their assistance where needful. And what in all this is either improbable, or rather not impossible, but to have bespoke? Such a handful of men as our troops of invasion were notoriously known to consist of, could alarm for nothing more than for some sudden assault, or transient ravage of one of their sea-ports along the coast; and for their most capital ones, or such as were the only ones worth attempting, they had little or nothing to dread, from their being inaccessible to our ships; and surely for Rochefort, least of all situate up a river, unnavigable for vessels of burthen, and where there is even no landing-place near it for troops under the cover of cannon.

(Enq. p. 20.) You will see that this very measure was, 'tis very likely, greatly desired and pressed by his R. H. the duke, as well as the king of Prussia, in the hopes of its making a powerful diversion in their favour. Too great a complaisance then, could not well be paid to their representations, and such a measure, had it had no other motive than condescension to their request, could not but be a laudable one. No less was owing to a prince of our own country, actually engaged with our enemy on the continent, and to a king, whose entertainment of the French forces, has been so serviceable to our cause. But surely they must have meant another sort of diversion, both in point of power and object, than Rochefort, or must have but imperfectly known  
the



the situation and natural strength of that place. It is not surely imaginable, that eight or ten thousand men designed against a coast, neither unprovided with regulars nor militia; to say nothing of the fortified places with which it is every where lined, could frighten the French court into the recalling a single file of musqueteers from Germany: That they could but do, in case of expecting the invasion of an army sufficient to attempt the conquest of, or at least a material penetration into the heart of their country. Such a plan required another sort of preparation than we made for a mere *coup-de-main*. The saying of Schomberg, who had no sort of reason to love the French, and was one of king William's best generals, is well known, viz. " That attacking France " in France, was taking a bull by the horns;" alluding to the excellent fortifications with which it is every where provided, and which are at once its defence against foreign invasion, and its tyrannical strong-holds for perpetuating domestic slavery: An advantage which Britain would not wish to buy at so dear a rate, nor, thank God, has any occasion for, whilst its natural bulwark of a superior navy subsists.

Victor Amadeus of Savoy, whose just jealousy of French ambition no ties of alliance could dissipate, and was certainly neither a coward nor a bad politician, on being urged to make an irruption into France, constantly answered, " That " he knew a thousand ways into France, but did not know " one out of it again."

Can the commander of the expedition then, who was at once intrusted with the success of it, and the lives of so many of his gallant countrymen, incur so much as the shadow of blame, for making a point of previously taking the fort of Fouras, by way of securing a retreat, when the hopes of taking Rochefort by surprize were already palpably cut off? Where the open conquest indeed of a country has been intended, a commander has, in order to take from his troops all hopes of retreat, burnt the ships that brought them, from which they were to know, that there was no alternative for them but death or conquest. But this bold measure always supposed in the commander a thorough knowledge of the country he was attempting, and of the dangers he was to encounter; whereas, in this case, the state of the place to be attacked is not, even to this hour, known here, with any sort of precision sufficient to ground a plan of operation upon it.

To have landed then, and, without securing fort Fouras, to have marched on to Rochefort, without the least intel-

ligence of what dispositions were there made to receive them, or on such a mad presumption as that of their having been intirely neglected, would not have argued true courage, or even merited so honourable an appellation as that of rashness, which is often in military exploits crowned by success; but of such gross stupidity and ignorance of duty, as no general, that deserved the name of one, could have been guilty of it.

Fouras then was undoubtedly to be taken, before the reduction of Rochefort could be attempted. But how? "Ay, that is the question." Difficulties invincible appeared, merely from its situation, against carrying even that paultry hen-coop. A single ship, laying against it, would probably have battered it to the ground in a few hours; but even a frigate could not be got up within gun-shot of it (*Eng.* p. 32.) The pilot Thierry engaged, indeed, to pilot a ship within a quarter of a mile of it; but it does not appear that he was capable of performing that engagement. The *Barfleur*, which drew two foot water less than the *Magnanime* (the ship which he desired for that purpose, and which was refused him, on the account of the damage it had recently sustained,) was on ground where she lay, between *four* and *five* miles distance from the shore. Even a bombketch (*Eng.* p. 44.) that drew but eleven feet of water, ran aground at a greater distance from Fouras than the bombardier could throw the shells, with the greatest requisite of powder, at an elevation of forty-five degrees, that is to say, above two miles and two thirds. In the mean time, you will observe, the French gave them one proof of their being neither asleep, nor frightened out of their senses; since, whilst the bombketch was ashore, they detached two large row-boats with two pieces of heavy cannon in their prow, and full of men each, to attack the ketch, in the face of the whole fleet; and would probably have carried her too, if the vice-admiral Knowles had not effectually interposed, by making a signal immediately for all the boats of the fleet to speed to her rescue, himself going on board the *Coventry*-frigate, to drive away the row-boats; in which time he ran a-ground, considerably within the space of an hour, five times, and at a greater distance from the shore than the bomb-ketch.

This however may shew you, that Fouras was unexpugnable by our shipping. And here it is presumeable, that the pilot Thierry, who had engaged for bringing the *Magnanime*, which drew (as before observed) two foot water more than the *Barfleur*, must have acknowledged his mistake;

take;



take ; for it can hardly be supposed that he would refuse undertaking to pilot the ship substituted on such good reasons. He was not, you will remark, examined before the board, being, it seems, absent, as well as sir Edward Hawke.

It appears too, by the Enquiry, that even after the council of war of the 25th of September, in which it was *unanimously* agreed, that the reduction of Rochefort was, in the actual position of things, neither *adviseable* or *practicable*, both the land and sea commanders were highly unwilling to give over all thoughts of landing, and attempting at least to do something. Some probability of success in attacking Fouras dawning to them, in fresh information that came in to them by their prisoners, they greedily seized it. The coming on the back of it, by landing forces in Chatelaillon-bay, carried with it at first an air of temptation. Nothing seemed more easy, more inviting, or more safe, than a fine beach, accessible to boats ; not a man to be seen on the shore, no batteries to annoy a landing on it : For a few guns, *en barbette*, on Chatelaillon-point, that could not reach it, are scarce worth mentioning. This spot, though at so much greater a distance from Rochefort, yet as it seemed to give some chance for an attack by land on Fouras, induced the land and sea officers in chief command to think of putting the forces ashore there.

Here it plainly appears, by the Enquiry, that they were so far from being desirous of returning without attempting a descent, that they seized the first overture of one, without even a due regard to the most obvious rules of war, and I might not unjustly add, of common sense. For, according to all accounts, this beach was surrounded by sand-hills, considerably within less than musket-shot of the water-edge, by which any number of men might have been concealed, with the utmost safety from the cannon of the ships, till the instant of sallying should offer for taking advantages of the troops in their landing.

This too was a circumstance in which the night would but be the more favourable to the enemies ; in the confusion they must so reasonably hope to find troops setting foot on an unknown shore, themselves not only being at home, with a firm footing on dry land, but in case of a superior repulse being assured of an easy retreat. If it should be said, that the existence of troops behind those sand-hills is only a gratuitous supposition, a mere begging of the question ; let any one who knows any thing of the matter, but ask himself, whether any general could possibly not take it for

granted, that there must be forces at hand, even without the information of prisoners? Would any man in his senses, that knew in the least what France or War was, allow himself to doubt of there being troops in that country, alarmed and forewarned as it had been? The motions then of our fleet being watched, as they naturally must have been, nothing on earth could offer a more favourable mask to the numbers the French would have to oppose a descent, than those sand-hills. As nothing need to be surer too than that such forces they had in readiness; so it was equally sure, that it was their game to conceal them, till the madness of a descent should afford them a cheap market of us, when not the greatest courage could have stood the least chance against such obvious and unfair advantage.

But this was not all. When from an eagerness pardonable only to that courage which does not stand upon weighing of obstacles, and to that just spirit of theirs for serving their country at all events, this landing was resolved on; when even one division of the troops was already in the boats prepared to carry them to land, you will find a new and insuperable difficulty started. It appeared, that it was not possible to carry above two thousand men at a time to the landing-place. There were they to remain six hours, exposed to the whole force of an enemy, that could not well be supposed to be dead asleep, or insensible of such an advantage, before they could possibly be reinforced by a second debarkation. Then it was that the commanders opened their eyes at length, on the folly of such an attempt, which had been shut by the false shame only of doing nothing, where nothing was to be done: Then it was they returned to the most sensible resolution they had yet taken, that of the council of the 25th, of giving over what, for so many clear reasons, had so much better never have been undertaken.

I do not ask you to suffer your judgment to be influenced by merely the names of the gentlemen who subscribed to that consultation of the 25th, though I firmly believe they do not yield in point of bravery even to the foremost of those who have blamed their resolution for returning. No! only weigh but their reasons, and the examination previous to the report, and more especially the defective information of the first suggester of the undertaking (be it said without the least offence to him, since he could say no more than he knew, and what he did say was probably the exactest truth,) and you will own, that none but the French could have wished our armament had proceeded further in the

the execution of its mission. They indeed might have rejoiced, that so fine a body of troops should fall into a trap, the grossness of which would have robbed them of any pity for falling into it. They must, in all human probability, have been the victims to a mistake that was not their own, and that with their eyes open on the palpability of it.

But, Sir, the unpromisingness of this expedition was not judged of only by the event, but numbers here, on knowing its destination for the coast of France, and the constitution of things in those parts, made even no merit of pronouncing boldly, that nothing would or could be done by that grand armada. Many too, on seeing the equipment of so gallant a fleet, lamented its not having been earlier fitted out against another, and the only place in which France can receive a wound in her vitals, and that is *Cape-Breton*. The infinite importance of America, and the actual situation of things there, loudly called for such a decisive measure. And what could hinder its being taken with all assurance of success, early enough in the season, unless the activity of the state's being about that time miserably suspended by a scramble for power amongst private jundos, and insignificant party-cabals, may be given for a reason?

Had a much less armament than this one proceeded on that destination, the French interest in America must, in all human probability, have been destroyed by the ax being thus laid to the root; and the ships of our late unfortunate squadron in those parts might have, not unlikely, been riding the storm out safe and triumphant in the harbour of Louisbourg. Those who know most of things, know there is nothing exaggerated in the consequences, nor romantic in the hopes of such an undertaking; especially had it been then carried into execution. Had Rochefort even been taken, what would have been the consequence but the destruction of a few ships, naval stores, and arsenal: call it great; but still it could be no more than a transient repairable damage: whereas by getting possession of Cape-Breton, you not only cut off the spring-head of the French power in America, but may nip in the bud their best, and perhaps only nursery of seamen for their navy, with many other advantages therefrom, too obvious to need deducing here, where the mention of it figures only as a digression; but a digression you will, I hope, pardon, in favor of the well-meaning of it.

In that consultation of the 25th above referred to, and especially



especially from the opinion of the chief-engineer; who cannot be supposed very favourable to any resolution of desistance from an attempt of which himself was in some sort the parent, you will easily see at one glance, the nature, and cause of failure of the enterprize. You will see, that not a soul on board knew half the requisites to be known, before any execution could be proceeded to, or even rightly planned; and at the same time, that it was no fault of theirs that they did not know them. Vague and contradictory reports of the state of Rochefort, of its ditch and rampart; in short, only the most material points, and such as the fate of the enterprize, and of the lives of those employed in it, must turn upon, were the very points that remained, and still remain perfectly unascertained.

The plan furnished from memory by the chief engineer, with at least a confessed doubt of his, for want of information, what alterations might have been made since, was of itself sufficient to assure any general or engineer, "That if "no place was more capable of being taken by assault, if "it could be come at by surprise;" so no place, you can perhaps name, was more capable of being, within even a few hours, put into a posture of defence against such a sudden assault: and that no regular attack made any part of the design, cannot appear plainer, than for so good a reason as the engineer himself gives. "That the small quantity of "artillery they had, was not sent on that plan." (Enq. p. 105.)

The possibility of a surprise, then being absolutely over, the only chance for success by a regular assault, must have been their bringing their forces before it, and that too without artillery. But even that chance, desperate as it was, and which the commanders however were apparently determined to try, was denied them. By water, the situation was inaccessible: by landing indeed at Chatellaillon-bay, that is to say, if the French would have been so very polite as not to molest them, in their attempt of it, they might have got perhaps before Rochefort; and what to do there? to stand with their fingers in their mouths, or try to batter down its defences with threats, for other effective arms they could have none. In short, when I figure to myself the situation of our troops, fairly arrived before Rochefort, drums beating, and colors flying, I am tempted to think the French knew their own interest too well to interfere with the landing of our forces, or hinder them from proceeding up to the town. Nothing, in all human probability

lity would have afforded them a finer opportunity, or have played the game better into their hands. No retreat, no communication with the ships, any more than if these ships had been at Japan, no chance for escaping, but by fighting their way back again, under the greatest uncertainty in the world, of being able to get off the shore, even should the boats be ready to take them off, and all the while harrassed by those French forces, which not invincibly to have presumed were ready for their reception, after so long an alarm, would have been a folly beneath serious refutation: all these, I say, incline me to think the French desired nothing so much, as what some are so sorry here did not happen. Every true Englishman, however, who will give his own judgment fair play, in scorn of popular and ignorant prejudice, may rejoice, that such a number of his countrymen did not perish in so silly a snare, without profit to their country, without honor to themselves.

You will, I hope too, Sir, forgive me if I own myself not extremely edified by some passages in the Enquiry, of which I respectfully take for granted, the forms of public procedure, rendered the publication indispensably necessary; and which otherwise one would imagine, were highly improper to be published: and that is the names and descriptions of persons, who either they, or their families, are still under the French power, or are liable to come under it. Every one knows the alert and watchful genius of that government, over its subjects, or rather its slaves, whose actions and words are under the rigidest comptrol of its arbitrary resentment or caprice.

Mr. Macnamara is, if I am not mistaken, deceased, or the least that his politeness to an officer in English regiments, in permitting him to view the works of the place, would have cost him, was a severe reprimand, or perhaps a dismissal from his post, which he would have owed to the specific mention of him in the report. Further: amongst the accidents of war, there might occasions often offer for examination of French prisoners, from whence very valuable discoveries might arise. Now, might not it prove a great check on their confidence, on their communicativeness and natural inclination to talking; the having such reason to think their names and persons might possibly come to be published against them, in the procedure of some court-martial, or enquiry, so as to render them obnoxious to their own government? Might not this be a strong motive for their being shy and reserved? I am apt to believe such  
publications



publications are never practised under any government but ours; but at the same time, no doubt, it has its reasons for being above such an attention, though I do not pretend to penetrate them.

It was also for much the same cause I observed with infinite pain, that passage in Sir J. L-----r's memorial of advice to Sir J. M----- (*Enq.* p. 22.) "There are numbers of protestants in that province that wish you well, and would be glad to go on board with you." This hint was doubtless purely intended as a private one, and never for publication, so that no blame can in that light fall upon it. But it is not unhappily published? All who know the nature of the French government, especially its constant disposition to oppress the protestants, must easily allow that such a paragraph cannot come unwelcome to it, as it may give it a handle, at least for a greater vigilance, over a set of people thus marked out to them. Nor can they themselves be extremely obliged to us for such a designation: But what is still worse, it is most probably not entirely a just one. The protestants, who are still suffered, or rather connived at in France, in general, picque themselves on the utmost loyalty to their king and country. They deduce this duty from their religion, which even under persecution, forbids them to turn traitors, at such a crisis too, as that of an actual invasion. If numbers of refugees, on their quitting France, and flying from the face of oppression, took service under powers at enmity with it; it was not till after their local residence in the countries in which they had found refuge, from the most inhuman oppression at home, had changed the objects of their allegiance, that they departed from it, and became perhaps the most faithful, and certainly not the least useful subjects of those powers that were wise enough to give them harbour and protection. It is, I fancy, with reason, said, that numbers of the present protestants of France, especially in those very parts that were the scene of our projected invasion, would desire no better than an opportunity of signalizing their loyalty to their country, by way of the justest and bitterest reproach to their oppressors, for their infamous as well as impolitic spirit of persecution. Numbers, we are told, of these people offered their service, specifically on this very occasion, to the French government. But, however that may be, I cannot but think such a passage might, for obvious reasons, have better been left out, especially as it is nothing to the purpose of the Enquiry.

I come now to the Report itself, given in by the appointed  
commissioners

commissioners of Enquiry, and resulting from the matter of it. (*See Enq. p. 60.*) And here I begin with fairly owning to you, that it passes my comprehension. Could so extravagant a case be supposed, as that there was a collusive compromise agreed on between the projectors of the expedition and the commanders of it; that since some Report must necessarily pass, such an one should be dictated as should neither acquit the one, nor condemn the other; I should think there could not have been a more admirable piece framed for such a purpose.

Not a word is, indeed, said in it that might impeach the wisdom of the projection, or impute the failure of the expedition to its insufficiency. But not a word too is there in it, but what the commanders might even glory in avowing and subscribing to. If it satisfies the publick but half as much as it ought to satisfy them, then all parties owe to those honorable personages who passed the Report the justest thanks.

I pass over the preamble, as being merely matter of form and introduction; and shall only point out to you some parts of the Report, that cannot but justify to you my admiration of it. I suppose you have it before you, and proceed.

The first cause of failure appears to have been the not attacking Fouras by sea, at the same time that it would be attacked by land. But the absence of sir Edward Hawke, and of the pilot of the *Magnanime*, not admitting an examination into that particular, the opinion upon that point is left open and undecided. All that appears very plain is, that Fouras was inaccessible to an attack by shipping, notwithstanding the pilot *Thierri's* promise, which, it should seem, he could not make good. At least, in this the commanders are in no fault.

Another cause of failure assigned in the Report, is the non-attempting to land on the report received on the 24th of September from rear-admiral Brodrick and the captains, who had been sent out to sound and reconnoitre; when, instead of landing directly, a council of war was called on the 25th, in which it was *unanimously* resolved *not* to land, as the attempt upon Rochefort was neither *adviseable* nor *practicable*. To say the truth, after such a report as the commanders then received, after what they themselves could see of the local position of things, and what they must know or presume of the state of the country, they were, if it is not too disrespectful in me to say so, rather in the wrong for calling any consultation, if their resolution could have dispensed with the form of it: For, in fact, there was no matter of  
consultation

consultation at all. The nature of the errand they were sent on, and the impossibility of its execution, were already plain enough.

“ But it did not appear that there were then, or at any times afterwards, either a body of troops or batteries on the shore, sufficient to have prevented their descent.” This is most religiously true. As to troops, nothing can on earth be more certain, than that troops there were and must be in the country; and as certain, that the French must have been very great idiots indeed to have suffered them to be *seen*, when it was so easy and so much their game to conceal them. As to batteries in Chatelaillon-bay, the only convenient place for a descent, not one officer ever said there were any, or did not but aver the contrary; but who of them could not but see the impropriety, according to all the rules of war and of common sense, of effectuating a descent, from which no good could be hoped for the success of the main of the enterprize, the attack upon Rochefort? Could any thing counterbalance the moral assurance of being cut off division by division, which must have been the case, unless the French could be suspected of falling off, on such a tempting occasion, from their usual alertness, or have only suspended its exertion, in order to draw us more compleatly into the snare?

“ It does not appear (says the Report), that there were any sufficient reasons to induce the council of war to believe that Rochefort was so far changed, in respect of its strength, or posture of defence, since the expedition was first resolved on in England, as to prevent all attempts of an attack upon the place, in order to burn and destroy the docks, magazines, arsenals, and shipping, in obedience, &c.”

To all this the commanders might cheerfully subscribe, since it does honour both to their sense and obedience. They were sent surely on the plan of a surprize, or coup-de-main. Nothing can be plainer than their instructions on this head: but that case of surprize not existing, as considering the situation of that place, it could never, but by the favor of a miracle, exist: Rochefort might not indeed very materially be changed as to its strength, or posture of defence; but obviously ceased from the instant there was no hope of coming on it by surprize, to be a place possible to be taken by a sudden assault.

As to what the Report adds, “ that no reason could exist sufficient to prevent the attempt of landing the troops,  
“ previous



“ previous to the 28th of September, as the council *then* un-  
 “ animously resolved to land with all possible dispatch.”  
 Nothing can be more just, on the supposition that it was  
 right to have landed at all. It is even too favorable to the  
 commanders; for certainly every hour’s delay, after the in-  
 stant of their arrival, strengthened their reason for not land-  
 ing, could that have required strengthening. And they are  
 justly punished for the imprudence of not adhering to their  
 first and best resolution of the 25th not to land at all, unless  
 their zeal for attempting evident impossibilities, in the ser-  
 vice of their country, may be allowed to excuse them, and  
 the intention acquit them for the absurdity of their per-  
 severance in an enterprize, of which their own personal  
 knowledge might have already sufficiently exploded the plan  
 to them.

Even then by the report itself, abstractedly considered, you  
 may, Sir, easily discern, whether the failure is imputable  
 to the original sin of insufficiency in the project itself, or to  
 the persons commissioned to carry it into execution. You  
 may safely pronounce, without the hazard of a rash judg-  
 ment, on the materials of information before you, where-  
 on the enterprize was it seems embraced and planned, whe-  
 ther all the prerequisites of knowledge were duly obtained  
 before the dispatch in the armament (that is to say, on sup-  
 posing that it was ever seriously meant or hoped that it should  
 succeed) or whether a set of gentlemen of unattainted cha-  
 racters, and trusted with the arms of their country, could be  
 so grossly wanting to its honor, and to their own, as to re-  
 turn back with so bad a grace, if a better knowledge and a  
 personal view of things had not forced them to it, with a re-  
 gret they rendered but too apparent, by persisting in it so  
 much beyond the bounds of their duty, that one would have  
 thought them willing to prefer the bare *opinion* of others at  
 a distance, to their own actual and palpable recognition on  
 the spot.

Should you, however, after settling this point in your  
 own mind, proceed to any degree of curiosity for what fur-  
 ther may be expected from this measure of an enquiry,  
 which seems but a preparatory one to an ulterior procedure  
 upon it, it is not at least to me you must address yourself for  
 satisfaction. The low level range of humble common sense  
 can never pretend to reach the sublimity of those clouds in  
 which the exalted wisdom of our councils has so long rolled,  
 and carried the publick affairs to that pitch of prosperity and  
 renown.

renown in which they are at present so conspicuously seen. But if you will deign to accept a general rule of conjecture on any future turns of affairs that as yet lie hid within the womb of time, or in the heads of our modern statesmen; a rule that has for these many years hardly been known to fail; this it is. Imagine to yourself specifically what is most agreeable to common sense, and to the once believed just order of judgment, and then do not be *surprised* at finding the event diametrically opposite to it. In the present current of things, no oracle can afford you a surer prognostic than this method of anticipation by contraries. Should you then find a statue decreed to the great projector of this celebrated expedition, and national disgrace, or even an ignominious punishment allotted for those unfortunate enough to have been sent in command upon it, there can be nothing so strange in such a distribution of justice as to make you stare at it, if you reflect upon all the unaccountableness in our judgment and affairs for these many years last past. The folly would indeed now be to be surprised at any thing.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.